Mobility Greensboro Public Transportation Master Plan

Executive Summary



Prepared for:

City of Greensboro/Greensboro Transit Authority

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BACKGROUND

Public transportation is an important part of the transportation system in Greensboro and the entire Piedmont Triad area. The Greensboro Transit Authority (GTA) is the public transportation provider for the City of Greensboro. Established in 1991, GTA operates 14 bus routes between downtown and various areas of the City.

In August 2002, GTA and the City of Greensboro initiated a public outreach program to establish a vision for the future of public transportation. Since that time, GTA staff and its consultants have worked closely to develop a comprehensive vision for public transportation in the community.

OVERVIEW OF MOBILITY GREENSBORO

GTA and the Project Team worked cooperatively through the visioning and analytical process of Mobility Greensboro to identify a blueprint for how to achieve this objective.

A comprehensive program of service, marketing, and other improvements are outlined in this plan in an effort to achieve this objective. It is important to note that the focus of Mobility Greensboro was on fixed-route bus services. A major study of SCAT services was being performed simultaneous to this study. Recommended improvements are highlighted as follows:

- Partnering with universities and employers;
- Focusing on marketing and education;
- Increasing the frequency of bus service;
- Adding cross-town routes;
- Implementing park-and-ride lots along major corridors;
- Implementing a downtown circulator service;
- Working more closely with PART on regional transit services and issues;



• Enhancing transit infrastructure and technologies.

Through Mobility Greensboro, a comprehensive vision for transit has been developed and an enhanced understanding has been reached regarding its future role in the City of Greensboro.

Thousands of citizens and visitors have participated in Mobility Greensboro to help define the future of transit in our community. Public involvement efforts included:

- Stakeholder interviews with 18 community leaders, including face-to-face discussions with City Council members, County Commissioners, City staff, GTA Board members, and PART.
- Non-user telephone survey of 505 households in the Greensboro area.
- On-board user survey of 2,000 existing bus riders on GTA.
- Two Consensus-Building Workshops involving several hours of detailed, visionary discussions with more than 80 participants.
- Public outreach program that resulted in interaction with an estimated 350 citizens, 40 major employers, and the Transportation Committee of the Chamber of Commerce.
- Distribution of a Project Brochure and four Issues of the *Mobility Talk* newsletter to a mailing list of **nearly 500 residents** of Greensboro and the Triad area.
- Three meetings with the Project Steering Committee, which is comprised of approximately 15 members.

- **Four meetings** with the Project Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which is comprised of approximately **15 members**.
- Countless meetings and strategic discussions with GTA and City staff regarding the direction of Mobility Greensboro.

Input received throughout Mobility Greensboro indicates a sincere interest in expanding transit to become a more viable mode of transportation not only for individuals dependent upon transit, but also for individuals who may choose to use transit now and in the future.

PROJECT GOAL

Based on the public outreach process and direction from City staff, the major project goal was identified for Mobility Greensboro. This goal is:

"to double transit ridership in the next five years from two million in 2002 to four million in 2008."

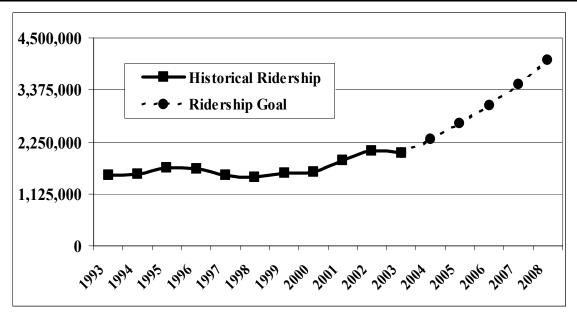
Figure ES-1 illustrates transit ridership since 1993, as well as the goal through 2008. As discussed throughout this plan, this aggressive goal will require a significant commitment by the City and GTA. This commitment will need to take the form of leadership by decision makers, capital resources to support new services, and financial resources to fund new services.

SUMMARY OF WHERE WE ARE TODAY

A major component of a long-range plan for any agency is a strategic assessment of how the agency functions as well as the environment in which the agency operates. Such an assessment is often referred to as a SWOT analysis, since it considers the Strengths and Weaknesses of the agency and the Opportunities and Threats in its environment.







In developing this assessment, the project team relied on insights offered by GTA management and staff, Board members, elected officials, and other key local decision makers as well as its own observations. GTA's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are summarized in Table ES-1.

SUMMARY OF WHERE WE WANT TO BE

Developing a vision for public transportation in the City of Greensboro was the primary objective of Mobility Greensboro. As a result, significant efforts were devoted to facilitating this discussion and developing an understanding of the community's vision for GTA. In particular, a summary of "where we want to be" was developed based on the results of:

- Stakeholder interviews:
- Consensus-building workshops;

- Non-user telephone survey;
- GTA on-board rider survey;
- Other public outreach activities;
- Assessment of GTA strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats;
- Discussions with GTA and other City staff.

While no specific time frame was necessarily associated with the ultimate plan, there is general agreement that the next five years are critical to the successful implementation of Mobility Greensboro. Many components of the plan, however, are longer-term in nature and would need to be gradually implemented over the next ten to 15 years.

Using the information compiled from the public involvement program, consensus-building workshops were facilitated with a diverse group of representatives throughout the Greensboro area.



Table ES-1 GTA Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats						
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES					
Provide mobility	Service not frequent enough					
Take people to work	Lack of choice riders					
Given independence to elderly & persons with disabilities	Cost increases, especially SCATLimited staff resources					
Serve transit-oriented areas	Serving outlying growth areas					
Improved reliability	Continuity with General Managers					
• Improved span of services	 Not enough quality vehicles 					
Improved frequency of service	Central transfer location					
Willingness to be innovative	Perception that GTA can be all things to all					
Responsiveness	people					
Fixed-route cost increases						
Service monitoring						
Board open to public comments						
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS					
Multi-agency efforts	Reliance on the automobile					
Focus on Downtown Greensboro	Only for those with no choice					
PART and regional integration	Difficulty with follow-through					
Increased public outreach	Lack of priorities/focus					
Improvements for current riders	Perception of inefficiency					
Expand to new markets	Carrying responsiveness too far					
Staff expertise						
Build upon local support						
Leverage state/federal funding						



Consensus-Building Workshop #1

On March 27, a group of 38 attendees gathered in the Nausbaum Room of the Greensboro Public Library to discuss issues of importance to the long-range planning process for GTA. After an overview of the Mobility Greensboro process and a synopsis of data identified during a professionally conducted telephone survey, each participant was assigned to a break-out group so they could easily express their views and listen to those of others. The groups were instructed to decide on common areas of interest and build consensus while noting any areas of disagreement. After two hours of discussion, each group prepared a summary of their discussion to report to all the attendees.

Consensus-Building Workshop #2

On September 11, a group of 40 attendees gathered in the Nausbaum Room of the Greensboro Public Library to continue Mobility Greensboro After an overview of the information that was gathered at the first workshop, each participant was assigned to a break-out group so they could easily express their views and listen to those of others. The groups were instructed to discuss a list of five topics outlined in the information packet that was handed out at the beginning of the meeting. After two hours of discussion, each group prepared a summary of their discussion to report to all the attendees.

The resulting transit improvement priorities are summarized below in terms of the five major areas of discussion.

Service Improvements

• Increase the frequency of service on existing bus routes.

 Implement new cross-town bus routes to provide more direct service to destinations that do not require a stop downtown at the Depot.

Marketing/Education

- Hire a marketing director to ensure a strong focus on marketing and education.
- Expand the travel training program to help existing and future transit riders in understanding how to use public transportation.
- Expand partnership with universities, colleges, and businesses throughout the City of Greensboro.
- Increase the number of media outlets where GTA information can be accessed and bus passes may be purchased.

Infrastructure/Technology

- Provide real-time customer information at the Depot and other selected locations (kiosks).
- Consider alternative fueled vehicles as part of future vehicle purchases.
- Focus on essential infrastructure, such as high quality buses, shelters, and customer information.
- Make extensive use of the Internet to provide information about GTA, display real-time customer information, and facilitate trip planning using the GTA bus route network.
- Coordinate with City staff regarding the sidewalk improvement program, placing an emphasis on access to bus stops and sidewalk connections between bus stops and major destinations.



Transit & Land Use

- Encourage transit supportive development by better integrating appropriate policies and procedures in the Land Development Code and the site plan review process.
- Consider the impacts of parking policies on public transportation and the potential for encouraging transit use through parking disincentives (cost and availability).

Transit Funding

- Be more proactive in pursuing grants from state and federal sources.
- Expand partnerships with universities, colleges, and businesses to help pay for existing and expanded transit services.
- Identify new revenue sources for GTA, such as fare increases, property tax millage increase, additional sales tax, parking revenues, and lottery.

A VISION FOR GREENSBORO

Mobility Greensboro was initiated to develop a vision for public transportation's role in the City of Greensboro's future. Based on the information compiled throughout the public involvement process, the vision include:

- clean, alternative-fueled buses coming by your home and destination every 15 minutes...
- those same buses traveling directly to your destination in downtown or cross-town...
- strong partnerships between GTA and the universities, colleges, and employers throughout the Greensboro area...

- the availability of park-and-ride lots on major corridors that provide convenient access to bus rapid transit that travels quickly and directly to The Depot...
- a revitalized downtown Greensboro that is pedestrian friendly and provides mobility through a downtown circulator bus...
- public transportation services that are integrated regionally to support convenient connections throughout the Triad region...
- the effective use of technology to improve customer service and enhance the availability of customer information...
- 11,000 daily bus trips on GTA within the next five years...
- 25,000 daily bus trips on GTA by the year 2025...

Mobility Greensboro lays out the possibilities, but more importantly, it reflects an action plan to make the possibilities become a reality.

THE MOBILITY GREENSBORO PLAN

Several components comprise the Mobility Greensboro Plan, including the following:

- Service Plan
- Marketing Plan
- Security Implementation Plan
- Capital Plan
- Staffing Plan
- Technology Implementation Plan



The Service Plan is summarized below, while the reader should refer to the complete report for additional information on the other plan components.

Service Plan

The consensus-building workshops and other public outreach activities yielded several good suggestions and comments regarding areas of improvement for transit in Greensboro. Most service-related comments fell into one of the following six categories:

- Add More Frequent Service
- Add direct service not through downtown
- Reduce travel times (partly through more direct service)
- Improve reliability, in terms of on-time performance, through scheduling adjustments
- Expand service area and integrate with regional service
- Attract non-traditional riders

Participants in the second consensus-building workshop had an opportunity to recommend priorities among these types of service improvements. Improved service frequencies and the establishment of cross-town routes received the highest priority, with support for schedule adjustments, service extensions, and transfer centers outside of downtown.

In response to these issues, concerns, and priorities, the Mobility Greensboro service plan was developed for a short-range planning horizon (within the next five years) and a long-range planning horizon (beyond five years). The short–and long-range service plans for Mobility

Greensboro are illustrated in Maps ES-1 and ES-2, respectively, at the conclusion of this Executive Summary.

THE MOBILITY GREENSBORO FINANCIAL PLAN

The Mobility Greensboro visioning process resulted in an aggressive goal of doubling transit ridership in the next five years, as well as a significant proposed expansion in services that would be necessary to achieve the goal.

One of the major tasks of the Project Team was to then develop a financial plan that:

- Provides operating cost projections for implementing the service recommendations of Mobility Greensboro;
- Provides capital cost projections that would be necessary to support service expansion and the additional infrastructure;
- Identifies potential revenue sources to pay for the local share of the operating and capital costs of Mobility Greensboro.

Figure ES-2 illustrates existing and proposed operating costs while Figure ES-3 illustrates existing and proposed capital costs. The proposed costs for operating and capital are a result of implementing the improvements recommended by the Mobility Greensboro visioning process. The Mobility Greensboro Financial Plan is presented in more detail in Table ES-2.

With the recommended improvements, operating costs (less capitalized maintenance) would increase from \$7.1 million in 2004 to \$17.3 million in 2009, an increase of 144 percent. Service expansion also requires an increase in capital costs, with all new capital projections occurring in 2005 and 2009.



Figure ES-2
Existing and Proposed Operating Costs, Mobility Greensboro

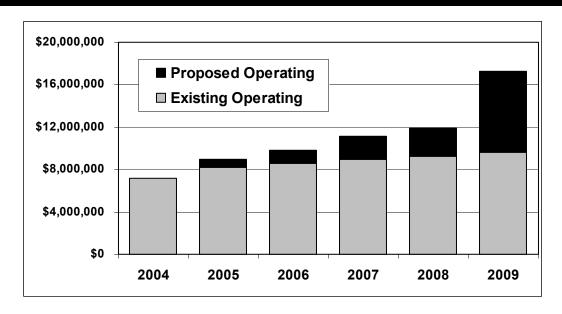


Figure ES-3
Existing and Proposed Capital Costs, Mobility Greensboro

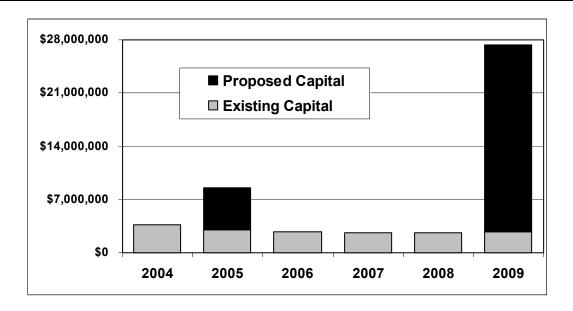




Table ES-2 Mobility Greensboro Financial Plan									
Cost Component	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009			
SUMMARY OF EXISTING & PROPOSED COST PROJECTIONS									
Cost Projections for Existing Services (Status Quo)									
Existing Operating	\$9,641,960	\$10,076,295	\$10,420,388	\$10,778,307	\$11,150,574	\$11,485,091			
Capitalized Maintenance	\$2,503,708	\$1,860,314	\$1,860,314	\$1,860,314	\$1,860,314	\$1,860,314			
Operating Less Cap. Maint.	\$7,138,252	\$8,215,981	\$8,560,074	\$8,917,993	\$9,290,260	\$9,624,777			
Existing Capital	\$3,622,458	\$2,994,678	\$2,798,138	\$2,668,226	\$2,685,639	\$2,766,208			
Total Existing Costs	\$10,760,710	\$11,210,659	\$11,358,212	\$11,586,219	\$11,975,899	\$12,390,985			
Cost Projections for Mobility Greensboro Improvements									
Annual Addl. Operating	\$0	\$735,000	\$482,000	\$865,000	\$301,000	\$4,845,000			
Proposed Operating	\$0	\$757,050	\$1,276,222	\$2,205,458	\$2,581,652	\$7,649,451			
Proposed Capital	\$0	\$5,575,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$24,600,000			
Total Proposed Costs	\$0	\$6,332,050	\$1,276,222	\$2,205,458	\$2,581,652	\$32,249,451			
То	Total Costs for Existing Services & Mobility Greensboro Improvements								
Total Operating	\$7,138,252	\$8,973,031	\$9,836,296	\$11,123,451	\$11,871,912	\$17,274,229			
Total Capital	\$3,622,458	\$8,569,678	\$2,798,138	\$2,668,226	\$2,685,639	\$27,366,208			
Total Existing & Proposed	\$10,760,710	\$17,542,709	\$12,634,434	\$13,791,677	\$14,557,551	\$44,640,437			
SUMMARY OF REVENUES AND SURPLUS/DEFICIT									
Existing Local Revenues	\$6,791,593	\$6,985,776	\$7,122,992	\$7,343,810	\$7,459,517	\$8,390,825			
Motorpool Vehicle Tax	\$890,000	\$890,000	\$890,000	\$890,000	\$890,000	\$890,000			
Total Local Revenue	\$7,681,593	\$7,875,776	\$8,012,992	\$8,233,810	\$8,349,517	\$9,280,825			
Federal Revenues	\$2,915,291	\$2,400,966	\$2,253,150	\$2,153,511	\$2,148,511	\$2,148,511			
Anticipated Fed Revenues	\$0	\$4,460,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$19,680,000			
State Revenues	\$813,150	\$928,876	\$928,876	\$928,876	\$928,876	\$928,876			
Anticipated State Revenues	\$0	\$557,500	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,460,000			
Total Available Revenues	\$11,410,034	\$16,223,118	\$11,195,018	\$11,316,197	\$11,426,904	\$34,498,212			
Surplus/Deficit	\$649,324	(\$1,319,591)	(\$1,439,415)	(\$2,475,480)	(\$3,130,647)	(\$10,142,224)			

Source: Adapted from GTA Business Plan, December 2002, Table 6 and Section 5 of the Mobility Greensboro Plan.

NOTES:

- (1) An inflation factor of 3% is applied to costs/revenues when actual projections are not available.
- (2) Capitalized maintenance is excluded from operating costs since it is already included in capital.
- (3) Federal revenues were taken from the most recent GTA capital plan (December 2003).
- (4) Anticipated Federal revenues cover the Federal share of unfounded capital (buses & AVL in 2005).
- (5) State revenues were taken from the GTA Business Plan (December 2002).
- (6) To be conservative, the Motorpool Vehicle Tax is assumed to remain constant at \$890,000 per year.
- (7) The surplus/deficit compares the total revenue with total existing and proposed costs.
- (8) The revenue surplus in 2004 is intended to help replenish the diminishing reserve fund for GTA.



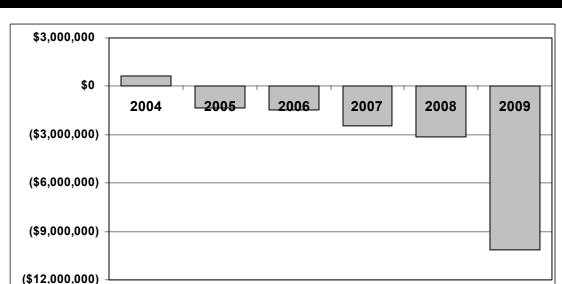


Figure ES-4
Projected Revenue Deficit With the Implementation of Mobility Greensboro

Please refer to Section 5 of this plan for further detail on the service and capital plans for Mobility Greensboro. Available revenues are provided at the bottom of Table ES-2, along with the resulting revenue surplus/deficit. The surplus in 2004 is intentional on the part of GTA in an effort to hellp replenish the reserve fund that had been depleted over the past several years. Subsequent to 2004, the revenue deficit ranges from a low of \$1.3 million in 2005 to a high of \$10.1 million in 2009. The revenue surplus/deficit is illustrated in Figure ES-4.

It is important to note that the bulk of the revenue deficit occurs in 2009, when significant service expansion is proposed in an effort to achieve the goal of doubling ridership within the next five years. If the City is unable to fund this significant deficit, it does not make the Mobility Greensboro Plan unfeasible; it may suggest, however, that service expansion would need to be extended over a greater time period, longer than the currently proposed five-year time

frame. For example, the recommended service improvements could easily be phased in over ten years rather than five years, making the investment more gradual over time.

POTENTIAL REVENUE SOURCES

Potential revenue sources were discussed as part of the Mobility Greensboro visioning process. Each source can placed into one of two categories, including (1) primary sources and (2) supporting sources. One or more of the primary sources would be necessary to implement the recommendations outlined in this plan. In addition, the supporting sources play an important role in the overall package of solutions and would reduce the level of support required from the primary sources.

Potential revenue sources are identified and discussed below in the context of supporting the implementation of Mobility Greensboro in the coming years.



Primary Revenue Sources

- Increase the full cash fare for local bus service Increasing the full cash fare could play an important role in addressing the revenue deficit identified in Table ES-2. It is important to recognize, however, that this revenue source cannot be the answer to resolving the deficit by itself. An across-the-board increase in all fare categories of 25% (e.g., full cash fare from \$1.00 to \$1.25) is projected to result in an approximate increase in fare revenues of \$0.3 million annually. Such an increase could be part of the package of revenue solutions so existing and future users pay their fair share of costs associated with the transit service and capital improvements.
- Increase the property tax millage rate for GTA GTA is currently authorized to receive an ad valorem property tax rate of \$0.02 per \$100 of assessed taxable land value from the City of Greensboro, which amounts to about 40 percent of the operating costs for transit operations. In 2003, this is equivalent to approximately \$3.4 million. The City is authorized to collect up to a rate of \$0.35 per \$100 of assessed land value for transit, which, if implemented, would increase the annual funding to nearly \$6.0 million, or an additional \$2.6 million annually.
- Increase the vehicle motorpool tax The recent transfer of the vehicle motorpool tax to support transit was an important step in resolving the recent deficit experienced by GTA and replenishing the depleted reserve. The current tax of \$5.00 generates approximately \$0.9 million. Increasing the tax to \$6.00 is projected to result in an additional.\$0.1 million annually; likewise, increasing the tax to \$10.00 would generate an

- additional \$0.9 million annually. The current level of funding is available to addressing deficits in the GTA budget.
- Pursue a sales tax for public transportation -Another option for the City would be to adopt an increase in the sales tax to support public transportation. Guilford County currently services a $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ sales tax, which results in an annual allocation to Greensboro of \$34.3 million, or \$6.9 million for each ½%. One example, based on recent sales tax collections, is that a 1% sales tax in Guilford and Forsyth Counties is projected to generate \$53 million annually. Such as tax could also be combined to support other transportation needs or even other municipal infrastructure and services. Many communities have adopted sales tax funding for public transportation on a countywide or region-wide basis (e.g., Mecklenburg County/Charlotte). It may be prudent to pursue a sales tax for the Piedmont Triad region, with a coordinated effort between PART and the counties of Guilford and Forsyth. Funding from a regional sales tax could be used to support the implementation of rail service and upgraded bus services that would integrate with the rail service. For example, if \$53 million were generated annually and \$30 million were used for regional rail, the balance of \$23 million could perhaps be used to support upgraded local bus services operated by GTA and the Winston-Salem Transit Authority (WSTA).

Supporting Revenue Sources

 Be more aggressive in pursuing state and federal grants - The City should be more aggressive in pursuing traditional grants and should work more closely with its legislative delegation to pursue Congressional earmarks as



appropriate (e.g., new and expanded operating and maintenance facility). An increase in the local financial commitment (see primary revenue sources) should also improve the ability to leverage additional state and federal dollars for public transportation.

- Pursue college pass program with local colleges and universities A college pass program was a critical component of the transit marketing plan for Mobility Greensboro. Similar programs around the country are typically funded by colleges or student fees and involve transit service specifically oriented to student destinations. Such a relationship can also play an important role in addressing parking shortages on or near campuses. GTA and City staff have already begun pursuing a college program in the Greensboro area.
- Expand Corporate Connections program Employer pass programs can be a win-win situation for businesses and GTA. It can provide a benefit to employees, a tax benefit to the employer, and/or help resolve a parking shortage, while at the same time increasing ridership for GTA. GTA has featured a Corporate Connections program for years, but without a marketing director to publicize the program and its benefits, it has not attracted much attention. Should a marketing director be added to the GTA staff, the program should be energized to expand corporate partnerships throughout the Greensboro area.
- Advertising Revenue Advertising revenue contributes a small amount to GTA's annual budget but could be emphasized more with the hiring of a marketing director. Advertising revenues may be generated from ads on schedules and system maps, on-board buses, at the Depot and other locations, as well as with

bus wraps. While an aggressive advertising program is not expected to generate more than \$20 to \$30 thousand annually, it can play a supporting role in the complete package of revenue solutions.

Joint Development - Joint development
 opportunities with the private sector are evident
 with the Depot, especially with the future space
 that will be available for leasing. Other
 opportunities will come about as other transit
 centers are established in the area.

The primary and supporting revenue sources identified for consideration as part of Mobility Greensboro are summarized in Table ES-3.

A CHALLENGE FOR GREENSBORO

Achieving the aggressive goal of doubling transit ridership from two million in 2002 to four million in 2008 will require a significant commitment by the City and GTA. This commitment will need to take the form of leadership by decisionmakers, capital resources to support existing and new services, and financial resources to fund new and expanded services throughout Greensboro.

It is important to recognize that the role of public transportation is substantial, as identified in the City's Comprehensive Plan. As a result, Mobility Greensboro provides the framework for expanding the public transportation system to fulfill this role.

MOBILITY GREENSBORO PHASE 2

Phase 1 of Mobility Greensboro, which is summarized in this report, provides the blueprint and framework for the future of public transportation in Greensboro. It should be recognized, however, that a Phase 2 is necessary to ensure that momentum is maintained and the City begins the implementation process for the Mobility Greensboro Plan.



Table ES-3 Potential Revenue Sources for Mobility Greensboro					
PROJECT REVENUE DEFICIT FOR MOBILITY GREENSBORO	\$1.3 in 2005 to a high of \$10.1 million in year 2009				
POTENTIAL PRIMARY REVENUE SOURCES					
REVENUE SOURCE	PROJECTED ADDITIONAL ANNUAL REVENUES				
Across-the-board increase of 25% for all fare categories	\$0.3 million				
Increase in the Property Tax for public transportation (to maximum)	\$2.6 million				
Increase in the Motorpool Vehicle Tax (\$5.00 to \$6.00) Increase in the Motorpool Vehicle Tax (\$5.00 to \$10.00)	\$0.1 million \$0.9 million				
Adoption of a Sales Tax (1/2 penny)	\$6.9 million				
POTENTIAL SUPPORTING REVENU	E SOURCES				
REVENUE SOURCE	PROJECTED ADDITIONAL ANNUAL REVENUES				
Be more aggressive in pursuing State and Federal grants	To be determined				
Aggressively Pursue College Pass Program	To be determined				
Aggressively expand Corporate Connections Program	To be determined				
Advertising revenue	To be determined				
Joint development at the Depot and other transit centers	To be determined				

To that end, the preliminary components of Phase 2 are identified below as important follow-up elements for Mobility Greensboro. These include:

- Prepare a detailed implementation plan with the assignment of specific responsibilities and timeframes for the completion of these responsibilities.
- Prepare a detailed staffing plan to support the implementation of Mobility Greensboro.
- Work with City staff to integrate Mobility
 Greensboro into the Comprehensive Plan and
 MPO Long Range Transportation Plan as
 appropriate.

- Provide service planning support as appropriate for service expansion outlined in the Mobility Greensboro Plan.
- Develop an Infrastructure Design Standards/ Guidelines Handbook to facilitate the consistent application of infrastructure and technology throughout GTA.
- Perform additional public outreach activities as appropriate to obtain input and maximize support for the implementation of Mobility Greensboro.



- Prepare a more-detailed financial plan once additional guidance is provided by the City Council, as well as City and GTA staff.
- Provide miscellaneous support services for the implementation of Mobility Greensboro as requested by GTA and City staff.

SUMMARY

The Mobility Greensboro Public Transportation Master Plan was an excellent visioning process that used community input to define the future of public transportation for the City of Greensboro. The challenge remains to make this vision become a reality.